

February 2003

EXOTIC NEWCASTLE DISEASE

What is Exotic Newcastle disease?

Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) is a very serious contagious and often fatal viral disease that affects most species of birds. Birds with END may have respiratory, nervous, or gastrointestinal symptoms, but birds may die without showing any symptoms. END is one of the most infectious diseases of poultry in the world; it is so virulent that a death rate of nearly 100 percent can occur.

Is END found in California?

On October 1, 2002, END was diagnosed in backyard poultry flocks in Southern California. There is an ongoing intensive effort by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), the United States Department of Agriculture, and the poultry industry to eradicate the disease from Southern California. For more information, visit CDFA's website at:

http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/ah/Newcastle_info.htm.

Is there a public health risk from END?

Public health officials have confirmed that END virus poses NO public health risk to consumers of eggs or poultry products.

Can people who work around poultry with END get infected?

Human illness due to END virus is extremely rare, but it has occurred in people with occupations that bring them in close direct contact with infected birds — for example, poultry processing workers, veterinarians, and laboratory staff. In contrast to birds, END virus is not very infectious for people and it generally only causes a mild brief illness. The virus can cause a short-term conjunctivitis (pink eye) or a low-grade fever with chills and headache. Pink eye usually occurs in only one eye and symptoms may include inflamed, swollen, and red conjunctiva with a mucous discharge. There is no specific treatment for END infection, but the symptoms usually last for only a few days.

How can occupational exposure to END be prevented?

People in close direct contact with infected birds should wear goggles, dust masks, and gloves while handling birds or when cleaning and disinfecting infected cages and equipment. They should also avoid touching their eyes and other mucous membranes while working. Whenever handling any animals, people should always practice good hygiene including thorough and frequent handwashing.

How long does the virus survive and how do you destroy it?

The END virus may survive for several weeks in a warm, humid environment, and indefinitely in frozen material. END virus is rapidly destroyed by dehydration, heat, sunlight, and most disinfectants. Normal cooking temperatures will destroy the virus.

How are infected birds and products disposed of?

Since END virus is highly contagious to birds, special precautions are taken during disposal to prevent spreading the disease to other birds. Infected or exposed poultry are humanely destroyed and are not used for human consumption. Carcasses, eggs, and other contaminated materials are sealed in plastic, placed in a leak-proof truck, and transported to an approved landfill for burial. Workers handling birds and products wear disposable coveralls, gloves, booties, hair covering, and a face mask to prevent spreading the disease to other birds by carrying END virus on their clothing or shoes. They also disinfect the outside of their vehicles after leaving an infected premises to prevent spreading the virus to new areas.